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Thursday, 28 April 2016, 10.30 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Liu Jieyi (China)

Members:

Angola	Mr. Lucas
Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
France	Mr. Delattre
Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
Senegal	Mr. Seck
Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ..	Mr. Rycroft
United States of America	Ms. Sison
Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Toro-Carnevali

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/384)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/384)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. O'Brien, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Vienna.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/384, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: It does not need me to tell each and every one of the members of the Security Council that the impact of five long years of conflict in Syria defies understanding, let alone description. The human toll and suffering are sickening and obscene in that senseless fight where there is nothing much left to gain. Hundreds of thousands are dead. Millions have been displaced. Countless families have been torn apart and towns decimated. Basic infrastructure is destroyed. For many who are merely surviving, life is miserable. Deliberately deprived of food and medicine, many face the most appalling conditions of desolation, hunger and starvation. We all must be ashamed that this is happening on our watch.

The recent cessation of hostilities has provided a much-needed moment of respite for some of those who are suffering in this terrible conflict. Yet the recent developments on the ground show a substantial and worrisome deterioration, not least with increase of

violence reported in Aleppo, Homs, Idlib, Latakia and rural Damascus. Just this morning, Syrian Government forces are reported to have restarted using aerial bombardment in Dar'a governorate for the first time since the start of the cessation of hostilities.

It is the duty of the Security Council to ensure that every possible avenue to end the violence be explored. I reiterate the call for sustained, safe, unconditional and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance. The parties to the conflict, the Security Council and the co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group must exert every effort to revive the cessation of hostilities. The Security Council must not squander the opportunity presented by talks in Geneva and by the cessation in hostilities to put an end to the massive human suffering in Syria. The world and the people of Syria need this. They need Council action.

It is civilians who continue to bear the brunt of the fighting. Since just the other day, an increase in fighting in Aleppo city since 22 April, with reported airstrikes on eastern parts of the city and improvised mortar rounds and artillery shells impacting in western parts, has left dozens of civilians dead and wounded. Civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, has also been damaged. Yesterday, air strikes in eastern Aleppo city yesterday struck Al-Quds hospital, killing at least 20 people, including 2 doctors. Another hospital in western Aleppo has also reportedly been hit. It is horrific that the presence of a hospital or health facility is now perceived by neighbours to be a threat to their safety. As the Chairman of the Task Force on Humanitarian Access, Mr. Jack Egeland, said, today this is a catastrophic deterioration.

On 19 April, a marketplace in Marat Al-Numan, in Idlib governorate, was hit by air strikes, killing more than 40 people and injuring some 145. A further 10 people were killed in a similar strike on a market in nearby Kafr Nubl. The killing of civilians, including five young children, is further evidence of a grotesque want of humanity on the part of those carrying out the attacks.

Fighting between the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and non-State armed opposition groups in northern Aleppo governorate continues. I am very concerned about recent reports of ISIL advances east of Azaz, which threaten several camps for internally displaced persons. In that area, near the border with Turkey, some 40,000 people have been displaced again, with many struggling to find adequate shelter. In Atarib

town, multiple air strikes hit the compound of the White Helmets — that is, the Syrian civil defence force. Five brave men who dedicated their lives to saving others were themselves and tragically killed.

Violent clashes on 6 April between ISIL and the Al-Nusra Front in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp have prevented people from leaving and significantly limited the community's access to much-needed aid. While between 13 February and 7 April, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was able to provide people in Yarmouk camp with food and medical aid, the Agency has been unable to deliver additional supplies since.

Despite the enormous challenge, the sheer courage of our United Nations people on the ground and our humanitarian partners continues to deliver life-saving assistance and support to millions of people across the country. The World Food Programme (WFP), for example, reached 3.7 million people with food aid in March. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) held a nation-wide polio campaign in March, reaching over 2.1 million children. This week, UNICEF, WHO and partners began another immunization campaign to reach 2 million children in besieged, hard-to-reach and underserved areas.

Moreover, humanitarian cross-border convoys this year are reaching nearly twice as many people compared to the same period last year. In March alone, convoys provided food aid to over 1 million people, as well as medical supplies, non-food items, water, sanitation and hygiene, and educational supplies to tens of thousands. Since cross-border convoys began in 2014, they have provided sustained assistance to many millions.

Humanitarian relief also continues to reach civilians through cross-line inter-agency operations. Twenty-one convoys deployed in March, and 24 operations have proceeded already in April. Since January, assistance has been provided to 778,175 people in need in besieged, hard-to-reach and other priority cross-lines locations. This week, the United Nations reached Rastan, the third-largest city in Homs governorate, for the first time since April 2015 — a year ago. Some 122,500 people received vital assistance, including nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, health-care supplies, education and other basic relief items. In a sobering reminder of the risk our colleagues face, a mortar struck in front of one of the vehicles in the convoy to Rastan, injuring the driver and killing a civilian. I condemn such attacks on humanitarian workers in the strongest, most

uncompromising terms, and call again on all parties to allow unfettered and safe access to those in need.

Since 10 April, WFP has led and carried out 14 high-altitude airdrops to those cut off by ISIL in Deir ez-Zor city, meeting the immediate needs of some 100,000 people. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is now distributing the assistance on the ground. While airdrops are used only as a last resort, with the support of many member States WFP is able to continue the operation to send food, as well as other humanitarian supplies, such as medicine, nutrition, water and sanitation supplies.

Evacuations have taken place as part of the four towns agreement. On 20 April, the evacuation of over 515 people from the besieged towns of Madaya, Zabadani, Fo'ah and Kafraya, including 80 medical cases, was successfully completed. This is the largest medical evacuation in Syria undertaken to date. But, sadly, it is too late for some. We should not forget the tragic deaths of two children and a young man in Madaya, whose requests for medical evacuation were rejected. While I welcome the evacuation, I underscore the call on all parties to the conflict to ensure that medical evacuations are timely and never tied to political agreements or issues of reciprocity. The provision of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance to civilians in dire need, must not be a political question. It must never be a bargaining chip in the war.

International humanitarian law is very clear on medical treatment. The sick and wounded must be given the medical care required by their condition. Medical personnel must be protected in all circumstances, and attacks against medical facilities are prohibited. Despite this, the withholding of medical treatment continues to be used as a weapon of war in Syria. We continue to receive reports of parties to the conflict ignoring these basic tenets of international humanitarian law. In March, Physicians for Human Rights reported one attack on a medical facility in Latakia, and that four medical personnel were killed, while the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that a medical facility in Deir al-Asafir in Damascus was destroyed by an air strike. As I highlighted, further attacks on medical facilities and personnel in Aleppo in recent days have destroyed another two hospitals.

The removal of medicines and medical supplies from aid convoys continues. Last week, surgical as well as basic health supplies, such as antibiotics and pain-killers, were not allowed onto the Kafr Batna

convoy. This week, on the convoy to Rastan, the Syrian authorities removed medicines from supplies, and scissors and anesthetic medicines from midwifery kits. This inhumane practice directly leads to unnecessary suffering and loss of life. We must continue to press the Syrian Government to allow the delivery of medical supplies. This is not idle hearsay; it can be proved, and no one should doubt that it will be when, one day, there is no fighting and those responsible are held to account. And they will be; there can never be impunity for this behaviour.

While the delivery of humanitarian aid and the capacity of the humanitarian community to overcome deplorable conditions and limitations are inspiring, it is important to remember that they are also stark reminders of the ultimate failure of parties to the conflict to uphold their fundamental responsibility to protect the people of Syria and respect international humanitarian law. The continued failure to do so will result in more death and more suffering.

I remain particularly concerned about reaching areas where complete access has been regularly denied. The United Nations has submitted the inter-agency convoy request for May to reach 35 towns in critical need, and I call for access to be granted without delay, including to Darayya and Duma. As has been reported many times, these areas are in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

Following the 16 April needs-assessment visit of the United Nations to Darayya, which managed to get into the town for the first time since 2012, the world has seen both that access is possible and that the need is acute and desperate. The town has been 80 to 90 per cent destroyed; there has been no electricity since 2012; and water, sanitation and waste management infrastructure is beyond repair. Households are unable to consume more than one meal per day and are giving priority for eating to their children. In the most severe cases, families are enduring entire days without eating, sending children into the streets to beg and being reduced to eating grass and wild vegetation. Following the visit to Darayya, the United Nations submitted a specific request to deploy aid to the city. Intensely frustratingly, that has yet to be granted. While access continues to be denied, the population of Darayya remains trapped, hungry and — let us be clear — starving. That is a word I never use unless it is true.

As I noted in my report last month, I welcomed the simplification of procedures to request cross-line

convoys. However, the application of these simplified procedures has not been consistent — far from it. The Government did respond within the agreed seven working days to our April cross-line plan, approving 7 out of 11 locations. Syrian authorities also agreed to provide facilitation letters within three days so that convoys could safely proceed. However, delays in receiving the facilitation letters within the specified three-day time frame have delayed many convoys, depriving civilians of the assistance they desperately need. If the new process for inter-agency convoys is to be effective, the timely issuance of facilitation letters must be met.

We do not need just sustained, unimpeded and unconditional access, but real and enduring protection for civilians and an improved humanitarian situation for the millions in need. Access cannot be a one-off or even an occasional event, and it cannot limit or prevent certain types of aid. The current levels of access still leave civilians starving and without medical care. Even in places reached this year, the needs are complex and require a comprehensive and consistent humanitarian response, which is currently often denied by parties to the conflict. Just as the humanitarian community relentlessly and bravely presses forward in efforts to reach more of the people in need in Syria, so too must the parties to the conflict grant safe, unimpeded access and with all of us — especially the Security Council — work towards a sustainable political solution that can allow humanitarian aid to respond most effectively.

The people of Syria cannot afford to see the situation move backwards again. If the international community fails to maintain momentum, with a sustained cessation of hostilities and full humanitarian access, the situation can and will only spiral further out of control. The international community simply must not let the chance we have today slip away. Frankly, I am not sure just how many more days, weeks or months the long-suffering people of Syria can endure this protracted humanitarian catastrophe.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.